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SUBJECT: RUSSIA'S HARDENING VIEWS ON SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Classified By: Charge d'affaires Eric Rubin: Reasons 1.4 (b, d).

¶1. (C) As the Kremlin's new national security strategy (septel) reasserts the priority of strengthening Russian influence in the CIS, well-connected Russian analysts and government-supported institutniki increasingly call for "positive neutrality" or the "Finlandization" of Russia's neighbors. The zero-sum Russian calculus extends to NATO enlargement and the EU's Eastern Partnership Initiative, with both seen as levers to marginalize Russia rather than enhance the stability and prosperity of the region. As Russia also pledges to build a strategic partnership with the U.S., most analysts view the assertion of Russian "privileged interests" in the region as the issue most likely to derail a fresh start to U.S.-Russian bilateral relations. Medvedev's European Security Initiative is one vehicle for the U.S. and like-minded OSCE members to reinforce principles of territorial integrity and sovereignty; however, we will have to address Russia's regional aspirations bilaterally, in what promises to be one of our most difficult dialogues. End Summary

Security Strategy Stresses Neighborhood, Disses NATO

¶2. (SBU) While the new national security strategy (septel) released by the Kremlin on May 13 eschews President Medvedev's formulation of "privileged interests" in Russia's neighborhood, it reasserts the importance of extending Moscow's influence in the CIS and former Soviet republics, while rebuffing western "creep" towards Russian borders. Characterizing the growth of bilateral and multilateral cooperation with the CIS member states as "the priority direction" of Russia's foreign policy, the strategy paper emphasizes regional and sub-regional integration and coordination through the CIS, Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Asserting a trend towards regional solutions without the participation of non-regional actors, the security strategy attributes increased instability to the deficiencies of Euro-Atlantic organizations. Littered throughout the policy document are allusions to a zero-sum competition along Russia's borders, with the Kremlin taking direct aim at U.S. missile defense plans in Europe as "narrowing" the possibility for stability. Similarly, NATO enlargement towards Russian borders is decreed "unacceptable," as is the alliance's assumption of "global functions at odds with international law."

"Finlandization" and "Positive Neutrality"

¶3. (C) In recent conversations with a range of establishment foreign policy analysts and GOR-sponsored institutniki, we have been struck by their hardening rhetorical posture on Russian redlines in the Eurasian neighborhood, which goes beyond traditional opposition to NATO enlargement and espouses the creation of buffer states. Carnegie Center's Aleksey Arbatov told us that NATO and EU efforts to assume the mantle of responsibility for European

security could only be interpreted by the Kremlin as the marginalization of Russia, which would culminate in the emergence of the CIS as a "zone of conflict." Medvedev's call for a European Security Treaty was motivated in part by the need to mediate rival claims for influence in the region, as well as to resolve competing demands between territorial integrity and self-determination. Arbatov was unabashed that "Russia has the right to oppose other alliances in an area that it seeks to dominate," particularly when the competing alliance contains voices (e.g. Poland and the Baltic states) that are overtly hostile to Russia. The U.S. could take issue with Russian domination, but it would be "foolish" to ignore Russian concerns over U.S. domination. A stable outcome, Arbatov argued, was "military neutrality."

¶4. (C) The "Finlandization" of Russia's neighbors was the formulation put forward by MFA-affiliated Center for Defense and Strategic Studies Director Sergey Karaganov, who -- like most of our interlocutors -- sees the competition along Russian borders as the most significant stumbling block to improved U.S.-Russian relations. While reaffirming GOR support for the territorial integrity of its neighbors, Karaganov maintained it was reasonable for Russia to expect "positive neutrality and open borders." Finlandization, Karaganov argued, was a bad word "only in Washington," but not in Helsinki, and Russian support for "free, affluent, democratic and neutral" neighbors was a legitimate foreign policy quest. Karaganov returned again to the danger posed by a western and Russian tug-of-war over Ukraine, warning that "Russia will never give it up" since Ukraine is "from whence we came." Arbatov, too, focused on Ukraine as the potential death knell of U.S.-Russian intentions to restart

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the bilateral relationship. U.S. and EU efforts to "intervene" and help modernize Ukrainian pipelines were "legitimate, but are they rational?"

¶5. (C) As the prospect of near-term NATO membership recedes for Ukraine and Georgia, Russia has expanded its opposition to western "encroachment" to the European Union's Eastern Partnership Initiative (EPI). Yevgeniy Kozhokin, recently appointed by Medvedev to serve as Deputy of the Federal Agency for "CIS Affairs, Compatriots Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation," told us that EPI was antithetical to Russian interests since its success would mean the "destruction of the CIS." While Russia understood that its neighbors would have diverse alliances, Russia distinguished between "deepening relations" with the West and "integration." Kozhokin argued that "geography was destiny," in that Russia had to be preoccupied with its neighbors and seek to influence their development, because it more than any other regional power would bear the consequences of their failure. "We live in this region, you don't." Europe and the U.S., Kozhokin argued, didn't have the answers to the massive challenges facing the Ukrainian agricultural and energy sector, and pointed to Bulgaria's "failing status" as an EU member as a necessary reality check on western ambitions. Also positing a zero-sum game for influence, Kozhokin concluded that neutrality along Russian borders was the most stable outcome.

¶6. (C) One of Russia's more moderate foreign policy analysts, and Medvedev's recent pick to serve on the Presidential Human Rights Council, Fyodor Lukyanov told us that the European Security Treaty could be useful, if it moved the U.S. and Russia away from the "trophy politics" epitomized by NATO enlargement. For the Russian leadership and public, he argued, NATO could never escape its Cold War brand. "NATO is not an organization for European security, it is the organization that won the Cold War." While Russia could understand NATO as a strictly limited military organization of the U.S. and its western European allies, "when it becomes a vehicle for everything, it is worrisome and not understood." While declining to speak in terms of neutrality, Lukyanov argued for post-Cold War

institution-building that would vitiate the necessity of NATO enlargement.

"Fresh Start" versus Spheres of Influence

¶7. (C) While Russia's national security strategy also pledges to seek a fully equal strategic partnership with the U.S. on the basis of mutual interests, Russian analysts point to the absence of a pro-U.S. lobby within decisionmaking circles on major security issues. While Karaganov hailed the improved tone of U.S.-Russian relations as a significant change from six months ago, when advocates of "correct relations" with the U.S. were viewed as "dangerous radicals," he and others stressed the fragility of the opening to Washington. Like *Echo Moskvy* Editor Aleksey Venediktov, Karaganov warned that much of the Russian establishment saw the U.S. dealing from a position of weakness, and were not in a mood to compromise on what Russia considered its core national security interests. While Medvedev could present a more "sophisticated and soft-pedaling" style to President Obama, the Russian President agreed with the substance of Putin's May 10 press message that NATO PfP exercises in Georgia were a "step backward." Recognition of Russian influence in its neighborhood, Venediktov told us, remained the diplomatic end-game for both the Kremlin and White House, as well as reflected the orientation of the Russian public.

Comment

¶8. (C) All of the analysts with whom we spoke argued for the U.S. and Russia to delink dialogue tracks and pursue cooperation in areas of mutual interest to the maximum extent possible, but warned that we will quickly reach the limits of "agreeing to disagree" over fundamental policy disputes related to Russia's regional aspirations. While Medvedev's European Security Treaty could be a useful gambit for reaffirming Helsinki principles, particularly in an OSCE context where Russia is woefully outnumbered, we will need to reinforce bilaterally with the Russian leadership our own redlines over respect for the post-Soviet sovereignty and territorial integrity of Russia's neighbors.

RUBIN